

VARDY

By Matt Oldfield

2nd May 2016

'Wake up ref, that's a blatant foul! He must be a Tottenham fan, I reckon...'

'Come on, you Blues!'

For once, Jamie wasn't cheering for his beloved Leicester City; no, he was cheering for Chelsea instead. And so were all his teammates, who were watching the game with him at his house. That's because if Chelsea could beat or draw with Spurs at Stamford Bridge, then Leicester would officially be crowned the new Premier League Champions.

'Premier League Champions' – unbelievable! It still sounded too good to be true. Surely, something that special couldn't happen to a club like Leicester City, and a striker like Jamie?

'Well if this is a dream,' he told himself, 'then I don't ever want to wake up!'

Back in August at the start of the season, the newspapers had made Leicester one of the favourites for relegation. And the

odds on The Foxes winning the title? A whopping 5000-1! Yes that's right, some people thought Lionel Messi signing for Stoke was more likely than Leicester lifting the Premier League trophy.

But the players didn't mind if others underestimated them; it only made them more determined to shock and succeed. All that really mattered was that *they* believed that Leicester City Football Club could keep improving. And they definitely did. The Foxes had won promotion from the Championship in 2014, then battled back from the verge of relegation in 2015. What next? To the players, anything seemed achievable in 2016, even winning the Premier League title.

So together, Jamie and his teammates had set out to prove everyone wrong, with the help of their new manager, Claudio Ranieri.

The Italian had started by making Leicester more solid and organised in defence. With Kasper Schmeichel in goal, Wes Morgan and Robert Huth at the back and little N'Golo Kanté winning every ball back in midfield, they had soon stopped conceding goals and started collecting cleansheets instead.

Excellent, and at the other end? Well, Ranieri could see that Leicester's line-up was perfect for the quick counter-attack. They had the hard work of Shinji Okazaki and Leonardo Ulloa, combined with the creativity of Riyad Mahrez, Marc Albrighton

11 minutes later, Jamie made it 2-0, pouncing at the back post like a proper Premier League striker. Leicester just would not be beaten. This was *their* season, no doubt about it.

Four days later, they pulled off a wonderful 3-1 win away at the Etihad to stretch their lead at the top to five points.

'Premier League Champions, here we come!' the players cheered at the final whistle. Their team spirit was so strong that no-one could stop them.

Jamie was having the time of his life, doing all those things that he had dreamed of as a youngster, before that heart-breaking day when his local club Sheffield Wednesday told him he was too small to make it as a professional footballer. After that, he had almost given up on the game several times, but thanks to the support of his family and friends, he kept on going, kept on doing what he loved most – scoring goals. And it turned out that his agent, John Morris, had been right all along:

'You can do whatever you want in this game. You can go on and play for England. That's how good you are.'

When John had told him that back in 2011 during his days at FC Halifax Town, Jamie had just laughed. 'Me, playing for England? As if, mate!' But now he was one of his country's top strikers, scoring goals against great nations like Germany and the

Netherlands. That second goal had come at Wembley, 'The Home of Football', and the feeling was out of this world – delight, pride and disbelief all rolled into one pure, raw emotion. Incredible!

And now, on 2nd May 2016, Jamie and Leicester City were just 90 minutes away from achieving the truly unbelievable – winning the Premier League title. So for one night only, every Foxes player and fan all over the world was a die-hard Chelsea supporter.

'Go on, Hazard!'

'We love you, Willian!'

At half-time, however, it didn't look good for Leicester. Tottenham were 2-0 up thanks to goals from Harry Kane and Son Heung-Min. It certainly wasn't the loud, happy, banging house party that Jamie had been hoping for.

'Oh well, we'll just have to win the title next week at home against Everton,' he said to Wes. 'No problem, we can do that!'

But everything changed midway through the second half. Spurs started panicking, and Chelsea started playing.

First, Gary Cahill poked the ball past Hugo Lloris from a Willian corner. *2-1!*

'Yes, you legend!' Jamie screamed at the TV screen, punching the air with passion. 'Right, game on, lads!'

Chelsea still had 30 minutes left to score that crucial equaliser. It was the start of one of the longest and most nerve-wracking half hours of the Leicester players' lives.

'Yessss!' they cheered as Diego Costa dribbled into the Spurs penalty area.

'Noooo!' they groaned as he slipped on the ball.

'Yessss!' they cheered as Hazard got the ball on the left side of the box.

'Noooo!' they groaned as his cross flew just past Costa's outstretched leg.

'Noooo!' they groaned as the ball came to Ryan Mason on the edge of the Chelsea box.

'Yessss!' they cheered as he scuffed his shot straight at Asmir Begović.

With 10 minutes to go, it was still 2-1 to Tottenham. But just when Jamie was starting to think ahead to Everton, Costa turned past Toby Alderweireld and slipped the ball across to Hazard...

'Yessss!'

...who curled it first time into the top corner. *2-2!*

'Yeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeessssssssssssssssss!'

There were amazing scenes at Stamford Bridge, and at Jamie's house too. There was an almighty explosion of noise and movement. Players were shouting, crying, jumping, hugging, and drinks were flying everywhere. Because Leicester City were now only moments away from winning the league title for the first time in 132 years.

'Come on Chelsea – just keep it tight at the back now!'

Those last 10 minutes were almost unbearable for Jamie and co, but at last, the final whistle blew. It was official – Leicester City were the new Premier League...

'Championnes! Championnes! Olé! Olé! Olé!' the players sang as they danced around Jamie's kitchen, arm in arm.

Although Jamie hadn't actually played in the game, he felt like he had. In his head, he had kicked every ball, and now he was exhausted and emotional. Unbelievable! It was a night – and a season – that he would never forget.

But it wasn't the time for resting and reflecting. No, that could wait, because Jamie's loud, happy, banging house party was only just beginning.